



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF  
H.B. 6883  
AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

**Education Committee**

**March 15, 2023**

Chairman Currey and Chairman McCrory, Representative McCarty, Representative Bethel, and other members of the Education Committee:

The Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law, is the largest children's legal rights organization in New England. Our mission is to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of Connecticut's most vulnerable children and young adults who are dependent upon the judicial, child welfare, health, education, and juvenile justice systems. CCA provides holistic legal services to these young people through individual representation, systemic advocacy, education, and training. Much of the direct representation we engage in across our projects is educational advocacy on behalf of youth and young adults with disabilities to protect them from push out, and ensure they receive appropriate and timely access to education and services and equal access to an education and related entitlements.

**CCA urges the Committee to pass into law H.B. 6883: An Act Concerning Students with Developmental Disabilities, as this bill contains several meaningful provisions which will improve educational access and outcomes for the vulnerable clients we serve.**

**Supports for Transition Aged Students**

First, this bill will enhance the support received by transition-aged students, or students preparing for life after school who range in age from 14 to 22 years old, by 1) creating an Office of Transition Services at the state level with the Bureau of Special Education (BSE), 2) requiring school district to hire dedicated transition coordinators, 3) ensuring the State provide training for these coordinators, 4) requiring collaboration between state agencies that serve individuals with disabilities beyond their life after high school including the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services (BRS) and also require detailed transition planning be commenced during the school year in which a child turns 14. From CCA's perspective, this bill will be most impactful for the young adult population we serve

who are in need of these services by creating more supports for them and making these services more readily available.

### **Extending eligibility through the school year in which a student turns 22 years old**

Additionally, this bill will clarify and extend the timeframe for students to be eligible for special education through the end of the school year in which a student turns 22 years old. Currently, students are cut off from special education services by their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, regardless of where it falls in the school year, often wholly impracticable for the meaningful provision of services. This change will result in additional focused service time for older students who need it the most.

### **Creation of the Office of Mediation Services**

This bill will also create a separate office within the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) called the Office of Mediation Services, whose functions will be separate and distinct from other components of the Bureau's work and will also set forth minimum training requirements for mediators employed. Through the establishment of this office, and its various detailed functions, mediation will become more accessible for parents and families throughout the state whether or not they have access to counsel.

### **Protecting the rights of English Language (EL) learner students and their families**

This bill will ensure the rights of EL students and their families are being honored and followed throughout the special education process by mandating district provided interpreters at PPTs and also requiring districts to translate IEP related documents into a family's native language. All too often, we encounter EL clients whose rights are not being followed prohibiting their full access to the special education process. This bill will ensure that EL families will not need attorneys to enforce this very basic right.

### **Ensuring transparency and accessibility of the administrative complaint process and engaging in additional oversight and monitoring.**

Finally, this bill will do two things to enhance the role of the Department of Education's BSE monitoring and oversight for the benefit of all special education students. First, it will ensure that the administrative complaint and due process hearing processes are succinctly and publicly explained and it will also make decisions from both readily accessible to the public. Second, it will empower and require the BSE to engage in random audits of special education programs rather than awaiting to conduct investigations based on complaints filed. Both of these provisions will improve the education received by special education students by elevating the role of the monitoring and oversight role of the BSE.

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**In summary, our office urges the Committee to pass S.B. 6883** given the improvements it will impart for all of Connecticut's special education students and especially the most vulnerable served by our office.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and time.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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